ZEN NOTES

BOOK NOTED by John Storm

The eyebrows jut outward like two sets of whiskers, a Chinese patriarchal beard upside-down over each eye. Face front or sideways, gazing into the camera or gazing away, alone or in company, D.T. Suzuki is always himself, unselfconsciously at ease before the camera. Such poise while being photographed usually belongs either to those who like very much to strike a pose or those who refuse under any circumstances to strike a pose. The inimitable Dr. Suzuki should probably be placed in both categories. For according to people who knew him, he could cast a spell over a crowd despite his small size and small voice, an act of self-projection possible only to an actor-at-heart, and yet no matter where he was or what he was doing, he was always utterly free of pretension.

In "A Zen Life: D.T. Suzuki Remembered," a collection of essays by and about Dr. Suzuki, there is nothing really new except the pictures, a series of photographs of the great Zen proselytizer by the Hungarian photographer, Francis Haar. But the pictures are marvelous, and Dr. Suzuki's essays seem as fresh on a second reading as they did half a lifetime ago to one who was then taking his first steps into Zen.

How did it happen that this scholarly, rational man became the chief vehicle for transporting an essentially non-scholarly, non-rational way of life to the West? Partly, perhaps, because the West was deeply conditioned to rationality, and felt more comfortable receiving a sometimes bizarre new teaching clothed in familiar language. And partly, too, perhaps, because underneath all the philosophical language he was so comfortable with, Dr. Suzuki was not the committed rationalist he sometimes seemed to be.

"Man is a thinking reed, but his great works are done when he is not calculating and thinking," he wrote. "'Childlikeness' has to be restored with long years of training in the art of self-forgetfulness. When this is attained, man thinks yet he does not think. He thinks like showers coming down from the sky; he thinks like the waves rolling on the ocean; he thinks like the stars illuminating the nightly heavens; he thinks like the green foliage shooting forth in the relaxing spring breeze. Indeed, he is the showers, the ocean, the stars, the foliage."

As for his own motivation, Dr. Suzuki said surprisingly little about it, although in one work, "An Autobiographical Account," he does touch on the matter briefly. A product of what many Westerners perceive as a faceless, conformist society, Dr. Suzuki was worried about what he perceived as a decline of individualism in the West. "Technology and science are quite splendid," he wrote, "but they tend to create an attitude of indifference toward the value of the individual. Individuality is much talked about in the West, but it is in legal or political terms that it is prized... With industrialization or mechanization, man comes to be used as a thing, and, as a result, the unbounded creativity of mankind is destroyed. Therefore, in order to emphasize the importance of true individuality and human creativity, I consider it necessary to write about Zen more and more."

A Zen master would no doubt have written less: his impact would almost certainly have been less. Indeed, if Dr. Suzuki had been a certified, authentic Zen master instead of what he was, how many of us, I wonder, would ever have heard of Zen?

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

5 July 1987

Thank you for the May issue in honor of Antony Tudor. I would like to share part of my own story in regard to expressing emotions connected with grief. For me, these have been, in addition to sorrow and despair, anger, contempt, hatred and fear.

My father died when I was seven years old: and since I did not consciously experience and express grief at the time of his death, these emotions festered inside me for the next thirty years.

Only at the age of thirty-seven--a year older than my father at the time of his death--did the events of my life force me to confront these, my true feelings.

Grief is hard work. However, I have found the work to be a profound teacher.

As for ignoring or repressing grief--I look back sadly at the life energy I squandered in that impossible attempt.

Given my personal background, it was interesting to read Sokei-an's comments on the teaching, "You must not lament or weep as would men in the world."

I believe the following may be useful to us, your readers, as a way of relating this teaching to the context of our own lives: Today, most people in our culture die in a hospital ward surrounded by machinery and technicians. As a whole therefore, we tend to grow up unacquainted with death and the emotions of grief.

But until quite recently in human history, death was part of the normal experience of growing up. A child would likely witness the death and the variety and intensity of emotion surrounding the death of grandparents, aunts and uncles, brothers and sisters.

This latter, more healthy situation is the background of both the Sixth Patriarch and Sokei-an.

So when they ask that we give up attachment to feelings of grief, it is--I believe--based on the unstated assumption that we have in fact realized and faced that vast and frightening range of emotions. This is quite different from asking that we deny or run away or ignorantly try to control our grief.

Yours, Marc Diament

IS ZEN TEACHABLE? by Robert Schwarz

One of the fundamental points a student of Zen learns quickly is that it is essentially chilly to logic as a means of conveying its deepest meaning. Indeed, if a workable definition of Western philosophy is "the reflective attempt to make all experience intelligible," then Zen can be called subversive of philosophy. The rich literature of Zen is replete with accounts of monks put in their place--for asking "logical" questions or exhibiting what in the Occidental tradition would be considered principled thinking.

Does this mean that in our present society a college course in Zen, for example, would be an anomaly, a contradiction? Some Zennists think so. As someone has said about philosophy itself, one can teach logic or the history of philosophy, but not philosophy as such. If this is true of Western philosophy, it is even more valid of Zen, which is more a kick-in-eye than a discipline which can be harnessed into a course.

And yet, I think it would be a mistake to adopt such a negative attitude too quickly. Not only are Zen centers everywhere involved in lectures and library work, not only are textbooks and anthologies on Zen widely used in colleges and universities, especially as collateral readings, but institutionalized courses "with all the trimmings," lectures, class discussions, and quizzes, are possible and make sense. With one proviso, I think: that the students must clearly distinguish between learning about Zen, its history, teachers, and sectarian differences, and "doing" or living Zen, whose only real purpose is the achievement of satori, just as one can study Buddhism as a scholar and spectator without organizing his/her life around its highest goal: enlightenment.

If all this be granted, what sort of courses are possible? Let me suggest two which I have offered over the years at my university. One I call "Existentialism and Zen." Here we compare and contrast two modes of human response to life and reality. And if one counts theistic and atheistic Existentialism as two "schools" instead of one, the com-

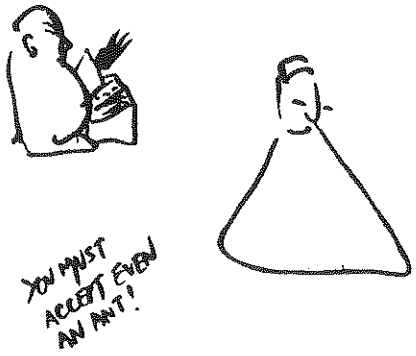
paring and contrasting becomes even more interesting and complex. The first couple of times I taught this course I was myself more sharply mindful of the differences than the similarities, but as time went on my students and I began to see that, despite differences in terminology and cultural peculiarities, there were important analogies to record, among which I would list a distrust of unaided reason to derive the heart of truth, an emphasis on a do-it-yourself attitude to religion and philosophy, a stress on the authentic style of life, etc. No wonder Heidegger declared late in life that all he really attempted to say was summed up in Zen.

The other course I gave, but so far only once, was called "The Total Culture of Zen." Its purpose was to show how close to ordinary daily life Zen is and how remote from abstract philosophy. We had "lessons" and demonstrations on flower arrangement, the martial arts, Judo, horticulture, the tea ceremony, and haiku, (with invaluable assistance by personnel other than myself, on and off campus), and we demonstrated the principles of *wabi*, *sabi* and *mushin* in a variety of human activities. This course was given within the framework of a special Institute of Experimental Learning.

Zen may be anti-intellectual at heart. But let us not "knock" either book learning, the spoken word or the institutional frame of reference. For most of us mortals it is impossible to do without these things. If I ask myself how I learned of the beauty, charm and truth of Zen, I would have to admit that it happened through the good old method of teachers who talked, books which could be read, and courses which could be "taken" at least as an initial stimulus toward later personalized and autodidactic learning. Even if the "bottom line" is do-it-yourself daily practice of meditation and private pursuit of the koan, Zen and discourse are not at war. Zennists, like philosophers generally, must kiss and tell, even though they may speak with stammering lips.

SESSHIN
WITH JOSHU SASAKI ROSHI
NEW MEXICO -- 1987

noted by j. shapiro



AGONY OF SUSPENSE

DEATH OF THE ANT

THE GREAT SIXTH PATRIARCH'S TEACHING, Chapter X,

"If after my passing into Nirvana, you practice Zen in conformity with this teaching, it will be as though you were living with me at that very time. If your attitude is inconsistent with my teaching, you will receive no benefit even though you are living with me at that very time."

The Master then recited the following gatha:

There is a man who has never practiced any virtue,/Nor has he practiced any evil./He has delivered himself from the state of seeing and hearing./He has banished all attachment from his mind.

When the Master had finished the recitation of the gatha, he sat down upon his seat and remained there until midnight. Then he said to his disciples: "I will go," and suddenly he went to another world.

SOKEI-AN SAYS *If after my passing into Nirvana, you practice Zen in conformity with this teaching, it will be as though you were living with me at that very time.* This teaching means that of sudden enlightenment. We are the distant followers of the Sixth Patriarch. Our school of Zen is the school of sudden enlightenment. The Sixth Patriarch died in the ninth century and we are living in the twentieth century. One thousand and one hundred years have passed since his death, but in conformity with his teaching, we still practice his Zen. We must be very proud of our way of following this teaching.

In the Orient, everyone who begins some new thing is always blamed. Everyone objects and wishes to follow the old traditional teaching. But now everyone is proud that his faith is twenty-five hundred years old. It certainly has some value that it has existed such a long, long time on earth. This is quite contrary to your attitude. You have old things and like new things. You throw away old teachings and try to invent something new. Your people are like tree branches spread out individually in all directions. But our idea is always like a tree root. Every branch must return to the root. I came to this country to speak about this one thousand year old teaching while you are inventing new teachings every day. But this old teaching somehow gives you a new

idea. I believe your period has come when all men in this Western hemisphere must return to their own living axiomatic truth, which is the truth within yourself, in your own nature. From your own mind, you will discover many treasures; from your own feeling, you will discover humanity. To return to yourself is the teaching of the Sixth Patriarch. He said: "If you practice Zen in conformity with this teaching, it will be as though you were living with me at that very time."

If your attitude is inconsistent with my teaching, you will receive no benefit, even though you are living with me at that very time. The Master then recited the following gatha: "There is a man..."

This "man" is the Sixth Patriarch himself, so I translate it "There is a man" but this is not written in the original Chinese text. As you know very well, Chinese sentences are composed without subjects. In this gatha there is no subject which denotes I or you, he or they. But in this case, the man who recites this gatha is the Sixth Patriarch himself.

This man has practiced neither virtue nor evil. I think to the dilettante's ear, this sentence sounds very queer. But from the Sixth Patriarch's standpoint, good or bad, evil or virtue, are secondary things. In this ideology, "good or bad" gives an Oriental man an entirely different conception from that of yours. There is a fundamental difference in how to handle these words between East and West. Our statesmen, our diplomats, our nations blindly argue with Western people about everything because our concepts of evil and virtue are so different. Your statesmen, your diplomats, your churchmen, without knowing how Oriental men think, merely attack and blame their attitude, blindly trying to promulgate the Western idea of virtue and evil. When this is rejected by the Oriental man, you send your army to attack him.

From our standpoint, as men who deal with thoughts, we harbor many questions. By understanding this fundamental difference in ideology of virtue and evil, we must prevent useless quarrels and fighting in the shower of blood and the rain of iron fire. But before we understand this funda-

mental difference in the concept of evil and virtue, we cannot find peace without fighting each other. To you, virtue is the first thing; good is the first attribute of God and there is no evil in Him. God is good, truth and beauty. The Hindu god always has two sides as attributes: the creative side and the destructive side--good and bad. Perhaps this gives you a strange feeling. Why must God be bad? Buddhists have our own way of understanding God. We do not call IT by any name. Our God is the universe--not a person and not a self. So man's nature is universal as well. If man has a nature as a person or as one separated from another person, he is not an ideal man. The characteristics of the Oriental man are derived from universal nature. You think that this man on earth is imperfect, but that behind this man there must be a perfect man, and that this perfect man appeared on earth as Christ. He is the agency of the perfect attributes of God as a person. When I studied Christianity with a Canadian missionary at the age of eighteen or nineteen, he explained what I have told you just now. I clearly remember his words. Now I understand that his ideas of the attributes of God were influenced by Greek philosophy and Greek idealism. So naturally your God is good and cannot be bad. But this word "good," in our conception cannot be translated as good. I think your idea of "good" is some virtue which is beyond evil, which has a nature beyond the evil and virtue on earth. There is no particular word for that in your usage, so you just call it good. If I make a diagram of this, I would say it is a circle with good and bad in it. Then this attribute of your God can be explained. God is good but good and bad are included in it. When God judges the action of human beings, he judges them as good and bad--so God admits that there must be bad. God himself is good. Good and bad exist on earth, but in heaven there is only good. If you explain it in such a way, we understand--the Oriental man can understand your idea of God.

The Master then recited the following gatha: There is a man who has never practiced any virtue,/ Nor has he practiced any evil. He is beyond earthly evil because he is living in the state which is transcendental to earthly virtue and evil. Of course,

in Buddhism, this denotes the state of Dharmakaya. Virtue and evil exist only in the state of Nirmanakaya, only in the state of the third law. If you follow the traffic law of New York, you are good; if you violate the law, you are bad. If you drive your car through Seventieth Street from Central Park West to Columbus Avenue, you are bad; but if you drive through Seventieth Street from Columbus Avenue to Central Park West, you are good. If, however, you are in the Arabian desert, you can drive your car anywhere you like and no policeman will arrest you. So, driving a car in the Arabian desert cannot be termed in the two words, *good* and *bad*. You must understand this fundamental difference. The Sixth Patriarch spoke from this standpoint--*"There is a man who has never practiced any virtue, nor has he practiced any evil."* From this standpoint he came out into this world. When I think now of what that Christian teacher taught me in my youth, I believe that perhaps he did not understand the true meaning of "good." His words were from the orthodox book; it was not the fault of the theology but of the teacher. The attribute of God which is good must not be the good which exists on earth, but a heavenly virtue. Now we can agree, but God's attribute of good, in terms of this human nature, we do not accept in religion. There is a fundamental difference. No fundamental difference exists between the West and the East, but our understanding is not mutually penetrating. We are quarreling and fighting because we are ignorant--especially statesmen and politicians who handle the thoughts of men in their ignorant way. You have been sending missionaries to the Orient for many years and some of us were educated by them. Now we must explain to you how we accepted your Christianity. Your churchmen do not know anything about it. Speaking such big words on this small corner of Seventieth Street is not worthwhile--but my words are true. When the time comes, perhaps two hundred years from now, someone else will speak the same words I am speaking now, and you will listen; your statesmen and also your clergymen will listen.

I do not want to speak about any national problems in my lecture, but I will say two or three

more words about the relations between America and Japan in regard to the Chinese situation. America does not disagree with Japan economically about the Sino-Japanese question, but America is taking the opposite side to Japan morally. Neither understands the other. The Japanese do not understand anything about the American idea of virtue. So they are just splashing each other with water for nothing. How stupid!

He has delivered himself from the state of seeing and hearing./He has banished all attachment from his mind. When the Master had finished the recitation of the gatha, he sat down upon his seat and remained there until midnight. Then he said to his disciples: "I will go," and suddenly he went to another world. In Chinese this means that he went to another world to promulgate his message. This is an expression always used for a monk's death. He changed his place. And thus the Sixth Patriarch died.

It seems to me that I have spoken unnecessary words here tonight, but my father was a Shinto priest. Then I followed a Christian teacher whose name was Reverend Bates of Canada. Later I studied with a Japanese, eminent in the Japanese Christianity of that period. And then I came to Buddhism.

In my present age, I cross my arms, sit down on my cushion and think about it. I now understand the fundamental difference between the Western and the Eastern teachings. This variance can be understood. There is a key to open the mystic box of two very different religions, and this key is Zen.

ST. THERESE OF LISIEUX SAID

"You are wrong to criticize this or that, to desire that everybody should adopt your view of things...Little children don't know what is best. Everything seems right to them."

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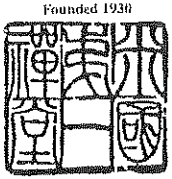

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